

Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in March 1933 and initiated New Deal spending programs to address the effects of the Great Depression more aggressively. As historian Bruce Seely has written, "highways became the largest public works program undertaken by the federal government, with 53 to 45 percent of all workers on federal relief programs building roads."² One of those new works programs was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. Through the Public Works Administration and the Bureau of Public Roads, \$9.5 million in 1934 and \$4.8 million in 1935 was distributed to North Carolina without the matching requirement. The distributions represented all the federal road funds the state received

proposal set off a spirited competition between North Carolina and Tennessee politicians and civic leaders for the route to traverse as much of their respective states as possible. North Carolina wanted the route to extend to Blowing Rock, Asheville, and the park. Tennessee advocated a route passing closer to the state line, with the last one hundred miles and an entrance to the Smokies in Tennessee.³⁵

Though the Bureau of Public Roads, the National Park Service, and the Public Works Administration were involved in planning the road, Harold L. Ickes, U.S. secretary of the interior, had the ultimate decision as to precisely where the federally funded parkway would be built. At